

# Listening: Homework and Simulation: Using Student Provided Material in Class

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*By Djibo Moussa*

Usually students are given writing and reading exercises to do at home rather than other types of assignments. Rarely are they given interviews to carry out. Only then can we talk of listening-practice homework, but this exercise is not, in most cases, meant for developing listening skills specifically.

When students learn English many of them intend to use their knowledge of the language to listen to news, special programs, music either on audio or video tapes; i.e., authentic material. This is a legitimate objective. In general these broadcasts are not made with this group of learners in mind but mostly for native or near-native speakers. Thus learners need to be encouraged to develop listening skills and be given homework as one way of reaching this goal. Making their own recording of radio and/or TV programs that will be used in class, building exercises they will have their classmates do, stimulate them. Other benefits are that the "social distance" can be reduced and the "affective filter" lowered. Moreover the teacher gets more authentic material s/he can use as supplemental material s/he can use.

Before using the tape in class, the teacher should listen to the tape/tape segment and check the exercise written by the student to be sure that the segment has good quality sound and that the exercise is well written.

I usually ask for short exercises: Three to five comprehension or multiple-choice questions, five to 10 missing words for a cloze exercise, etc. It is better to have the student prepare one kind of exercise.

The procedure I have used in developing a listening class segment is as follows:

1. Ask volunteers to record audio tapes and/or videotapes.
2. Any student who brings a tape is asked to prepare an exercise for a short segment of his/her tape. Exercises may include:
  - multiple choice exercises,
  - cloze exercises,
  - general comprehension questions (requiring full and/or yes/no answers),
  - listening dictation,
  - note-taking,
  - listening and oral/written answers,
  - listen and draw a map, a graph, a picture, a road,
  - listen and match synonyms, antonyms, picture and sentence,
  - listen and cross out what has not been mentioned or does not belong,

- listen and formulate oral/written questions,
- listen and complete a dialog.

Most of the above exercises can lead to speaking and or writing activities when the teacher is responsible for teaching those skills.

3. The student is given five to ten minutes to work with his/her classmates at the beginning or at the end of the regular class, following the suggested steps below:

3.1. Introduce the tape: In general terms say what the segment is about.

3.2. Present the exercise: Questions can simply be written on the chalkboard beforehand or given to students by means of work sheets (mostly for cloze and multiple choice exercises).

3.3. Familiarize classmates with the exercise: Reading and explaining it if it is necessary.

3.4. Classmates listen to the segment and take notes if they want to.

3.5. Classmates do the exercise.

3.6. Correction: Students may compare their answers or individual students may be called upon to give their answers. Different correction patterns can be used.

4. Once the correction is over, the teacher makes sure that the tape is handed to another student (volunteer first) who must prepare a five to ten minute lesson sequence for the next class.

5. The teacher keeps a good record of who made a presentation, who has a tape, when s/he was given it, when s/he is scheduled to present a lesson sequence.

In writing the listening exercises, one may also create *scanning* and *skimming* exercises. These exercises will include listening for specific information such as name, date, word, etc. (scanning) and or for main ideas (skimming).

**Presenting homework assignments this way has several advantages including:**

- The material is authentic: The tapes contain the type of material students are exposed to in real life situations.
- The students do the homework: They listen to the reader/speaker and/or watch TV programs, then prepare an exercise (training themselves at the same time) and learn practices and develop strategies for listening.
- The students become motivated: First, they find out what they can do with radio/TV programs; secondly, the material they collect is useful to the entire class as it is used for an actual classroom activity. They see their work valued.
- Students can easily be exposed to varieties of speakers, topics, registers, and contexts.
- Listening skills are being sharpened without specially channeling the students into the preparation of tests such as TOEFL, ALIGU, GRE, Michigan and so on.

- Students become more and more confident listening to radio/TV programs
- Students can increase their speaking skills because they have a more diversified exposure to vocabulary, idioms, intonation, topic shift, register change, etc.

## What Else Can the Teacher Do?

1. S/he may take over from where the student's segment ended for his/her lesson of the day. S/he may want to add a different type of exercise such as a dictation. On another day the teacher may give the same kind of exercise as the student but one which requires a more attentive (or longer) period of listening.

2. It will be good to alternate audiotapes and video tapes, whether they are from the students or the teacher. Also alternate news and special programs such as debates, lectures and discussions related to science, culture, etc.

3. It is left to the teacher's choice to grade a presentation or not.

Getting students involved in their own learning by showing them new ways reinforces the idea that the teacher is a facilitator and that s/he is interested in both his/her own work as well as in the student's work. To have the students do this kind of homework is to break away from the usual pattern. This homework is practical and meaningful.

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